



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE BIBLICAL WORLD

VOLUME XXX

AUGUST, 1907

NUMBER 2

Editorial

WILL THE STATE DISPLACE THE CHURCH?

THE TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS FROM CHURCH TO STATE

In a recent number of the *International Journal of Ethics*, Professor Edward O. Sisson calls attention to the many ways in which the state has been and still is absorbing the functions formerly discharged by the church. Reminding us that the ancient pre-Christian state included religion in itself, and that the process that went on in the early Christian centuries was one of adoption by the church of functions anciently belonging to the state, or of creation of functions which in ancient society scarcely existed at all, he goes on to point out that we are now witnessing a reversal of this earlier process. Education, the relief of poverty, the defense of the weak against the strong both in the matter of affording asylum to the accused and in the protection of employees against employers, and now at last even the "cure of souls," to the extent at least of seeking the reform and reinstatement of the criminal—all these originally belonging to the church and in large part its creation, are now in process of passing over into the hands of the state. With what feeling must the church view this process which is undoubtedly going on under our eyes? Should it arouse apprehension and lead to efforts to check it, or should we rather rejoice in it as evidence of the gradual accomplishment of the things for which the church exists?

CHURCH AND STATE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

In discussing the question we must at once dismiss the thought of two mutually exclusive bodies of people, the one making up the church and the other the state, and each contending for control of

the same area of life. As matters are in this country at least, and to a very large extent in European countries also, what we actually have is on the one hand the state, in which all the people have part and the activities of which are directed by officials elected by those members of the community who have the right of suffrage, and on the other hand the church, made up of those who from a religious motive have associated themselves together for the accomplishment of certain moral and religious ends. The church then which is numerically speaking a part of the state differs from it besides, in the voluntariness of its organization and activities, and in the religious motive leading to these. When, therefore, we speak of the absorption by the state of functions once discharged by the church we really mean that the whole people is taking over to itself, and intrusting to officials who represent the whole people, functions once discharged voluntarily by a part of the people; and our question is simply whether such a process of transfer from a voluntary organization of a part of the people impelled by a religious motive, to that organism which represents the whole people, is a healthy one to be viewed with approval, or an unhealthy one to be watched with fear.

HISTORY JUSTIFIES THE EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCH

Let it be observed in the first place that the very process which Professor Sisson describes, first of the creation by the church of functions either not previously existing, or ineffectively discharged by the state, and then the gradual absorption of these by the state itself, fully justifies the existence and work of the church thus far. It was the principle of love for which the church stood that led to the establishment of those educational institutions which, originally controlled and supported by the church, have developed into that widespread and constantly growing system of education of which the modern world today is possessed. It was the church also that first undertook effective means for the relief of the sick and the poor and the insane. Modern organized charity, modern hospitals and asylums for the insane, all owe their origin to the voluntary activity of the church. The juvenile court and the schools for reformation, displacing punishment for its own sake, must also be recognized as, equally with these other institutions and activities, the product of

that spirit of which the church has been through all the Christian centuries the pre-eminent representative.

LIMITS TO THE PROCESS OF ABSORPTION

Let it then be observed in the second place that a doctrinaire absorption by the state of functions discharged by the church on the basis of a theory that the state ought to do these things, accompanied by an elimination of the very best elements in these activities on the ground that the state cannot include these elements in its work, is to be deplored. The application of such a theory would make not for the promotion of the well-being of the citizens of the state, but to the defeat of the end sought alike by church and state. It is a serious question whether something very much like this has not already taken place in the educational sphere; whether the state in taking over from the church the task of education has not to some extent eliminated from its educational work some of those elements which it is most necessary to preserve. The problem is a difficult one. But the principle which we have stated is obviously sound. If the state takes over functions once discharged by the church it must not at the same time emasculate them of that which is most vital.

VOLUNTARY EFFORT CANNOT BE ELIMINATED

And this leads us to recognize further that the elimination of the voluntary element from all forms of activity which have to do with the promotion of the well-being of the state through the improvement of individuals is in itself thoroughly undesirable. Much that was once done by the human hand is now better done by machinery invented by the human mind. But there are limits beyond which this process cannot be profitably carried. For the care and nurture of little children, the correction of the erring and the weak, the admonition of the tempted and the straying—for these and many other like tasks no machinery can ever be invented. Something may be done even officially to systematize the work and oversee the agencies by which it is accomplished, but into it there must always enter an element of voluntariness, of choice, of unselfish love for the work and for those who are to be benefited by it. Professor Sisson inter-

estingly calls attention to the fact that in this process of absorption of churchly functions by the state the spirit of love which originated them has been retained in their assumption by the state. But until the state shall have become not only thoroughly permeated with the spirit of Christian love, but shall also have acquired a certain delicacy of touch which we are not wont to associate with legalism and officialism, a voluntary organization controlled, as the church is, by the highest and most spiritual motives must continue its work.

THE CHURCH AS THE HOME OF RELIGION

But if the church must continue to exist for the doing of a type of work which the state as such can never hope to accomplish, it is yet more certain that it must continue in order to foster and nourish that religious life without which love itself would languish and die. For there is nothing which the past history of religion has more certainly proved than this, that in the long run morality must be rooted in religion. The Pauline formula, "faith working through love," correctly expresses the verdict of the world's experience in this matter. Christianity is right as against all opponents in this at least, that social ethics and social well-being must find their basis in religion. Non-religious ethical culture is inadequate to the task of promoting human well-being, even in those spheres which such ethical culture itself recognizes. And because this is so there will always be need of a hearth and home where faith, fellowship with the Unseen, shall be nourished and sustained; for without this love itself must eventually wither and die.

Nor can the church ever have a more important duty than this. To discharge this faithfully and successfully is to guarantee the fulfilment of the more external tasks of education, charity and the like; whether through the state or the church is relatively immaterial. But to fail in this fundamental task is to fail in all. For while a church animated with the spirit of religion may so permeate the state with the spirit of love that all the needful institutions of education and charity may flourish, the state can never create religion where it does not exist. For how shall the whole people possess aspiration and zeal for such a task when not even a part of the people are sufficiently filled with the religious spirit to be moved to undertake it? Nor can the day be near, if indeed it can ever come, when to the

state can safely be intrusted even the nourishment and development of religion. For how can that, which in its very nature represents the average life of the people and does what it does by authority, accomplish what must by its very nature be the voluntary expression of the highest and deepest life that exists in the people?

THE PERMANENT NEED FOR THE CHURCH, AND ITS PRESENT TASK

If, indeed, we may look forward to a period when the state shall be as fully controlled by love as it is the Christian ideal of the church to be controlled, then indeed we may view without apprehension the increasing absorption by the state of those external functions which once belonged exclusively to the church. For this is simply to say that when the whole people is as fully controlled by the highest ideals as it is now the ideal of a part of the people to be controlled, then the whole people may safely be trusted to do what once only a part of the people were either fit to do or cared to do. But not even then will the Church be without a mission. To it will still belong the deeper and more delicate task. What has already been achieved—the gradual Christianization of the state, the gradual absorption by it of functions once discharged by the church without the loss of that spirit of love in which they were originally developed by the church—all this the church has accomplished precisely through the cultivation of pure religion in the hearts of the people. In this same direction lie also its present duty and opportunity. By the presentation of religious truth and the highest ideals of personal life, by the lifting up of the fallen, by the encouragement of the faint-hearted, by the development, by all means in its power of pure, strong, personal character, it will be at the same time doing that work of which the state has not yet shown itself capable, and preparing the state for the possible future enlargement of its own sphere of activities. The voluntary minister of religion, the voluntary Christian church, is still and must be for many years to come, a necessity not only to the development of the highest type of man, but even to the further Christianization of the state. To keep alive the flame of spiritual life which furnishes the impulse and the power for all good works in church or state—this is the supreme task of the church, and than it there can be no higher.